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Imagine that your childhood playground was a mine field. That your neighborhood slowly decayed and became a cemetery. The only nightlight in your room was the glow of

THE FACE OF WAR

napalm from outside the shattered windows. Even the bogeyman fears the dark things that emerge after sundown, the real monsters. The rotting breeze echoes with the voices

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COVER BY JAE LEE

VANTAGE™
COMIC & CARD PICKS
Chase Card Special

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staff

Publisher and Editor	Rob Golub
Associate Editor	Steve Asvitt
Art Director	Michael Munshaw
Assistant Art Director	Arcadia Design
Non-Sports Expert	Rembert Parker
Columnist	Corey Bond
Reading Picks	Rich Keller
Publisher's Assistant	Boy Brian
Toy Picks	Gregg Keefer

Special thanks to our advisors!

Vantage Comic & Card Picks Volume One, Chase Card Special, August 1995.

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TOP PICKS OF THE MONTH

Avengers: The Crossing (Marvel / Deodato, Big Avengers Push)

Dawn #1-up (Sirius / Built in following, great art)

MORE VANTAGE PICKS

Avengers #390-up (Marvel / big Avengers push)

Captain America #443-up (Marvel / Waid, big Avengers push)

Drama #1 (Cry For Dawn / 1st Appearance Dawn in a story)

Exiles: Infinity (Marvel / Malibu / Ultraverse / New X-Men team?)

Mantra: Infinity (Marvel / Malibu / Ultraverse / 100% female)

Thor #490-up (Marvel / Deodato & Deodato lead-in, big Avengers push)

New Warriors, all this summer (Marvel / Joins Spider-Man Family)

Spider-Man exiles storyline (Marvel / Hot storyline, especially with kids)

Generation X, all post-Apocalypse (Marvel, X-Men under printed)

Uncanny X-Men, all post-Apocalypse (Marvel, X-Men under printed)

X-Man, all post-Apocalypse (Marvel, X-Men under printed)

X-Men, all post-Apocalypse (Marvel, X-Men under printed)

WATCH FOR THE VANTAGE STAR INDICATING OUR TOP PICKS!

"The above pick list is a guide based on research, advisors' opinions, and staff opinions — keep in mind that even the experts will disagree. Comics can lose value after months or years. Read over the facts and opinions in Vantage, examine the pick list, and then make your own decisions. Remember: 1) There's no sure thing. Never bet the farm on any one book. 2) It may be fun to hunt for winners, but comics are even more fun to read!"

- Publisher Rob Golub

THE TRUTH ABOUT CHASE CARDS

It was a tough decision, whether to publish this issue. Our chase cards issue is sure to be controversial. That's why we pretty much spelled it all out in the solicitation — anyone who ordered this issue knew what they were getting.

The controversial part is that we are picking up the King's robe and taking a peak underneath. It turns out that underneath all the pomp and circumstance, he's just some guy. And behind the mystique of chase cards, there's common sense methods of finding some of the ones you want.

It's our hope that by exposing the truth about chase cards — that they're not that hard to find — that the card companies will be inspired to do better. Most companies do seem to make the attempt, but the slightest error in masking chase packs can be bad news.

The key for retailers and dealers is to keep an eye out for customers who want to finger card packs in the store. If they want to examine a few packs or a box, sweetly suggest they buy it and bring it all home to play.

As always, comments on this issue and all others are welcome. Keep an eye out for Vantage #15, our 25 top creators issue, and also look for our upcoming Internet issue.

- Rob Golub
Publisher

A celebration began this past August when a new generation in the comic book industry shed the name Continüm and emerged as August House, Inc.
Our flagship title is

THE DARK

This immortal warrior will come your way, in the midst of night, in full color every five weeks.

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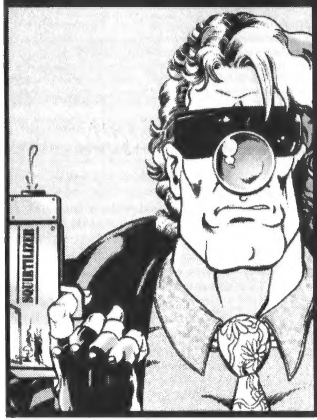

FOODANG

Our second title is the touching story of a circus clown who becomes a superhero, fights some crazy aliens, hooks up with a telepathic runway model, and wrecks a lot of expensive real estate.
AN IMMORTAL WARRIOR AND A CLOWN WITH A GUN INVITE YOU TO THEIR HOUSE...

AUGUST HOUSE, Inc.

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JULY IS MURPHY'S MONTH

July kicks off Murphy's Summer. For those of you who missed last issue, **Vantage** subscribes to the theory that when something can go wrong it will. We know this from our own experience as publishers ourselves.

Marvel, as of July, will be sending its comics to stores a completely new way. And as with any big change, strange things are sure to happen — which **Vantage** expects will have an equally strange effect on the after-market.

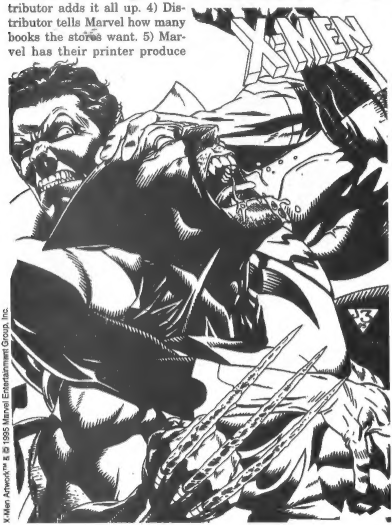
Here's how Marvel used to distribute a comic book to a store in, say, Chicago: 1) Marvel tells the distributor about the comic. 2) Distributor puts the comic in the catalog (**Previews, Advance,** etc.) 3) Stores and fans order out of the catalog, and distributor adds it all up. 4) Distributor tells Marvel how many books the stores want. 5) Marvel has their printer produce that many (and some extras). 6) Distributor trucks pick up Marvel's books straight from the printer. 7) Distributor takes books to warehouses all over the country and divides them up for each store. 8) Distributor trucks the comics ordered to each store.

Six months ago, most of this distribution stuff was not Marvel's problem. Now it is. Marvel, having purchased a small distributor with three warehouses in New York and New Jersey, now must serve the entire United States. Employees who have never been involved in distributing comics before are now serving stores for Marvel across the land — that is, as of July.

Vantage has already seen Murphy pop up in the Mega Marvel catalog. That Punisher cover, well let's just say we wouldn't call it a museum piece. Also, somebody forgot they were writing to consumers, not retailers, putting stuff in there like, "readers love last-issue blow-outs." Then there's that Beavis ad that declares, "Enjoy a unique opportunity to capitalize on the enormous resources of America's most progressive market ..."

Well, perhaps Marvel speaks the truth on these subjects, but that won't change the fact that fans don't like the sort of sales-laden talk that Marvel usually directs at retailers. The first Mega Marvel is littered with this stuff, and **Vantage** winces every time we run across it. On a business note, **Vantage** thinks it's pretty brilliant of Marvel to list Marvel/Malibu crossover books in both the Malibu and the Marvel sections. Just make sure you don't double your orders on those books by mistake.

And so, true believers, while **Vantage** is confident that Marvel will pull all this off surprisingly well, we doubt the first month or two will move along perfectly. July is the first month, and since print runs could turn out low due to Murphy Marketing, a first-try Mega Marvel, or Murphy distribution, **Vantage** considers all Marvel summer



X-Men Artwork™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

Yes, says Marvel, it really is the conclusion to the Spider-Man clone Story.

books with even slight potential to be serious potential hits.

Here are the books that especially stand out for July and beyond ...

New Warriors. This team is to be increasingly integrated into the Spiderverse this summer. We all saw how the demand for **Excalibur** back-issues jumped when it was integrated into the X-verse, so it only makes sense that with the Scarlet Spider hopping around **New Warriors** and the rest of the Spiderverse, the demand for **New Warriors** books should go up. **New Warriors** #61 sticks out in particular, as it leads into a rather large Spider-storyline.

X-Men titles, all. Fans of the X-Men are always looking for back-issues and X-sales have reached a real low-point. During this Murphy's summer, dealers might be wise to stock up on the X-books as they come out. **Vantage** has a feeling that fans of the future won't be able to find them in many boxes. For more on this see our **X-Men** article.

Spider-Man clone conclusion. Yes, says Marvel, it really is the conclusion to the Spider-Man clone story — wrapping up this July in **Web** #127, **Amazing** #404, **Spider-Man** #61, **Spectacular Spider-Man** #227, and a Spidey **Omega.** One Spider will be left in the original suit and one will be exiled.

Demand for New Warriors books should go up.

Marvia Artwork™ & © 1995 Malibu Comics

MALIBU FEATURED ON MAD ABOUT YOU

Malibu is stepping from one visual medium (comics) to another visual medium: national television.

Craig Knizek, co-producer of the hit television series, Mad About You, recently contacted Malibu about using their comic books and posters as set dressing in an upcoming episode of the show.

The episode features a special guest appearance by Eric Stoltz. He plays a graphic artist who is getting a lot of attention for a new character he has created. That character is based on Jaime, played by Helen Hunt, but she is unaware of it. Because of this, many funny plot twists and interesting situations arise during the show.

"We are so excited to be a part of such a popular series," says Scott Rosenberg, President of Malibu Comics. "To have the opportunity to work on something like this is really a thrill for everyone involved. Many of our employees are big fans of the show," he added.

Dealers Should Look To X-MEN™

Given that X-sales declined substantially after the Age of Apocalypse, now is a great time for dealers to buy **X-Men.**

Vantage feels confident that it is unlikely we'll be seeing **X-Men** books from the second half of 1995 in the fifty-cent boxes of 1996. The truth is, Marvel did their big X-promotion for the year. Now, as Marvel turns its attention towards the Avengers, look for **X-Men** numbers to fall.

That's good news for show dealers. Most dealers will be focused on bad girl books, toys, card games, and whatnot. Very few will be stocking up on X-books, and that's where the action is this summer.

Vantage expects the X-books due out this summer to go up in the guides just as the X-books always do — with an exception. Not only will the books go up in the guides, *but fans will be eager to pay guide for them.* At an entire show in 1996, there might not be a single summer of '95 X-book in a single bin.

The main books to watch are the staples — **X-Men and Uncanny X-Men.** Also, the still-early issues of **Generation X** and **X-Man.** Ridiculous as it may seem, the closer a comic title is to the root word — **X-Men** — the better it seems to do overall. X-titles will heat up and slow down but **X-Man** will probably be hot for the long haul.

No* is a great time for dealers to buy X-Men.

X-Men: Artwork™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

CAN MARVEL MAKE AVENGERS INTO THE NEXT X-MEN?

Avengers™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

Marvel is building up the talent on the **Avengers** line with an eye towards turning it into another **X-Men, Vantage** has learned

The feeling at Marvel is that the X-editorial office seems to do it right, and that the X-Men should be looked at as a model. Since the Avengers are also naturally group-oriented, Marvel hopes to pull them out from under the shadows and into the spotlight.

The most highly publicized step in the right direction for the Avengers books has been the addition of Mike Deodato to **Thor,** starting with #491. Remember that **Thor** #491 has already been made a **Vantage** Top Pick of The Month.

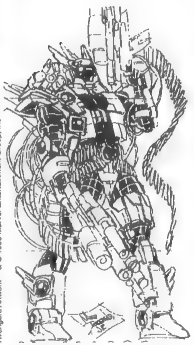
Still, there's more to this story than Thor. **Vantage** hears that big changes are afoot for **Iron Man,** including (groan) a clone-style storyline. Yes, **Vantage** hears there may be another Tony Stark in your future. **Iron Man** art will take a step up, thanks to yet another up-and-coming Brazilian artist.

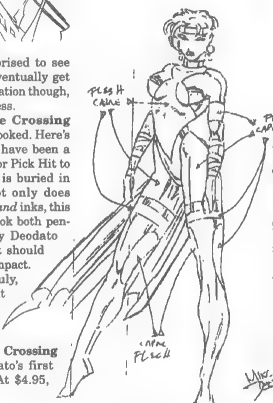
More impressive than the Iron-SM rip-off, though, is Mark Waid's new stint on **Captain America.** Starting with #443, the former **Flash** and **X-Men: Alpha** writer does Cap. Waid is one of the few celebrity writers in the business. Now doing the art on Cap will be Ron Garney, whose previous work has been on various horror books including **Ghost Rider.** Garney's art is clean and attractive.

On a more disappointing note, a heavy inker continues to blot out Deodato's style on **Avengers.** Deodato's studio is eager to provide the inks, but as of yet the old inker is still on the book. Since **Avengers** is of course the centerpiece title of the Avengers line, and since Marvel execs are under tremendous pressure to sell books, **Vantage** would not be surprised to see Deodato's studio eventually get the nod. No confirmation though, just a **Vantage** guess.

Avengers: The Crossing should not be overlooked. Here's a book that might have been a Gem of the Month or Pick Hit to Click, but instead is buried in Mega Marvel. Not only does Deodato do pencils *and* inks, this book is the first book both penciled and inked by Deodato from Marvel. That should create a powerful impact. Due out in late July, this book comes out a month before the first Deodato **Thor** even ships.

Avengers: The Crossing will also be Deodato's first chromium cover. At $4.95, orders will be low, but if Deodato does eventually win over the inking job for Avengers, this will have been his first **Avengers** book. Either way, as Marvel builds up the Avengers line, **Vantage** has a hard time picturing **Avengers: The Crossing** just sitting around in the back-issue bin.





JIM LEE'S WILDSTORM PRODUCTIONS UNVEILS CARD GAME

Artwork ® ™ & © Aegis Entertainment, Inc. dba Wildstorm Productions, 1995

WildStorm Productions has decided to enter a new market — that of collectible trading card games.

WildStorms will feature all of WildStorm Productions' popular characters and will also contain some surprise appearances by a number of non-WildStorm characters. Art for the cards will be provided by the entire WildStorm art team. WildStorm hopes to build on the popularity of its characters by offering expandable card games.

"Ranked as a title family, WildStorm's comic books have only been outsold by the X-Men family in recent months," said trading card editor Ted Adams, "so interest in the WildStorm stable of characters is strong. Coming off of WildStorm Rising, these characters are hot. By putting them in a very playable, fun game system, we're able to capitalize on the popularity of the characters and popularity of collectible, expandable card games."

WildStorm expects 315 cards in the first run, with more added later. **WildStorms** is due out in August.

Coming off of WildStorm Rising, these characters are hot

Artwork ® ™ & © Aegis Entertainment, Inc. dba Wildstorm Productions, 1995

WARNER BROS. STARTS TOY LINE

Warner Brothers Consumer Products, a division of Warner Brothers, has announced that a new division, dedicated to the development of toy lines for new and existing television, animated, and theatrical properties, has been formed.

The announcement was made by Dan Romanelli, President of Warner Brothers Worldwide Consumer Products. Acme Design and Development, a noted design team, will be responsible for the creative effort of Warner Brothers in this venture. In addition, Acme will also meet with the inventor community to find unique offerings that will fit into the Warner Brothers entertainment family.

"This is a natural evolution for us, from acquiring one of the most talented design teams in the toy business, to selectively creating toy lines that will be developed and marketed by Warner Brothers Toys for distribution through our Warner Bros. Studio Stores and other major retailers," Romanelli said.

PUBLISHERS TRY TO COPY X-FILES SUCCESS

Several comic publishers are starting new comic titles with themes similar to **X-Files,** in an attempt to cash in on the success of Topps' new title.

Publishers are hopeful that it is not just the show that fans are after but the flavor and theme. Publishers with **X-Files** style books already in the hopper include Marvel, Entity, and Caliber.

Caliber for example is starting a whole new line! Like the others, Caliber never actually mentions **X-Files** by name, but it comes through in their promotion. Their "New Worlds" line of four titles will be "Exploring the unknown ... the unimaginable ..." says a Caliber statement.

Raven Chronicles is about a team of operatives who investigate any and all causes of paranormal activity. The team is (sound familiar?) formed of both skeptics and believers alike. In spite of our sarcasm, the book has the potential to do nicely. **X-Files** is a hit, and Caliber generally puts out quality stuff.

A bit further from the original is **Inferno,** a comic that's basically about Hell, and **The Searchers,** a team that investigate real oddities that are only fiction in our world. Finally, **The Underside** is yet another horror book.

Dealers may want to give books like these a second look, perhaps racking them near **X-Files.** You certainly don't need to rack **X-Files** next to **Lady Rawhide,** since each reaches a radically different market.

Show dealers should watch carefully — a few killer covers on one of these **X-Files** knock-offs could create a hit.

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Ten Speed Company, Inc.

BIG ENTERTAINMENT TAKES A LOSS, EXPECTS IMPROVEMENT

Big Entertainment Inc. expects a loss in the latest first quarter ended March 31 of $1,996,745, or 49 cents a share, on revenues of $1,633,579.

A spokesman said the loss is still an improvement, which is partly due to an increase in the number of monthly titles it published to four in the early 1995 from three at the end of 1994. More recently, the company has increased the number of titles to seven.

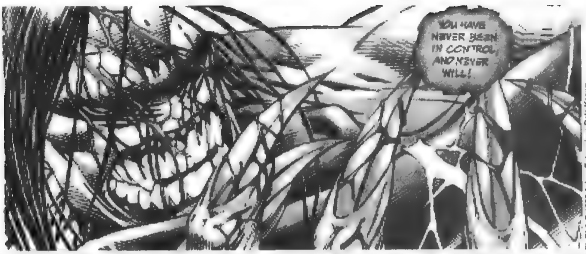
Big Entertainment expects the additional titles to increase revenues beginning in the second quarter, a spokesman said. The company expects a "significant" increase in revenues for the remainder of 1995.

Big Entertainment also said it raised its stake in Fedora Inc. to a controlling 50.1% from 25.1%. Fedora, of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is the owner and publisher of *Mystery Scene Magazine.*

Artwork™ & © 1995 Big Entertainment, Inc.

The loss is still an improvement.

Artwork™ & © Big Entertainment, Inc.



Pitt™ & © 1995 Kitchen Enterprises Dale Keown

THE INDUSTRY HOLDS ITS BREATH

The comic industry held its breath in June, waiting for Image to make its decision. With Marvel and DC spoken for, Image is the final major player that must choose a dance partner.

With Marvel making up about a third of the market, DC accounting for around 20%, Image is the final player in the line-up with a truly substantial market share. After Image's share, Dark Horse weighs in at a comparatively small 5-6%.

The general consensus is that it would be in Capital City Distribution's interest to exclusively distribute a publisher that retailers have to order. If Capital, for example, has no exclusives, or only has an exclusive with "No Name Comics," some retailers might choose to order from Marvel and DC/Diamond only — just to make a complicated situation a little easier.

Thus, Capital has wisely chosen to woo the leftover publishers, while also working at convincing retailers of the added benefits of doing business with Capital — even without exclusives. The end result here is that Capital has pursued an aggressive advertising and flyer campaign directed at building confidence with retailers, while the rest of the industry stands on the sidelines wondering what will happen next.

Capital's purchase of Friendly Frank's may not have been just to pick up the customer base and the assets. It may have been a move on the chess board — an action aimed at removing the purchase of Friendly Frank's from Image's consideration. **Vantage** has learned that the sale of Friendly Frank's to Image was indeed an option on the table.

But just as Capital might welcome an Image deal, Image needs a distributor. Heroes World won't carry anything but Marvel (with a few small and rare exceptions). Diamond is an attractive option for several reasons, but may also be seen as a competitor due to DC's newly-formed close relationship with Diamond.

In early June, the creator-owners of Image Comics held a meeting to discuss the situation. The creator-owners of Image, which includes Jim Lee, Todd McFarlane, and Rob Liefeld, rarely hold such a meeting with full attendance. This meeting was an unusual exception.

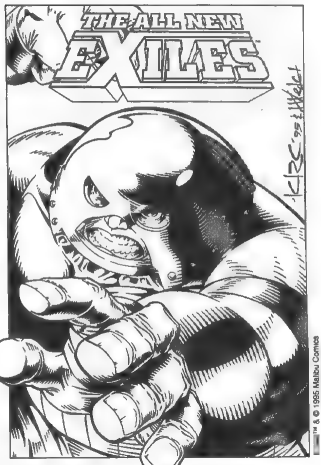
And so the industry waits. With many employees having lost their jobs (due to the industry-wide sales loss from last year), and with everyone wondering if Image and Capital will marry, the talk of the town has been anything but comics. What will Capital do? What will Image do? What will Dark Horse do?

Rarely is any thought given to what cool comics are coming out this summer. And therein lies the show dealer's advantage. For as new distribution deals cause havoc, as the hold-box system takes a hit due to two or even three new catalogs now required to get a peek at everything that's due out, marketing plans for the summer are at an all-time low level of blah. As insiders focus on the business of comics, it seems to **Vantage** that marketing has been forgotten.

Vantage expects resulting low print runs on all of this summer's books, and the sort of mess that could turn the most unlikely of books into hits. Retailers might be wise to lean on their cards, games, and toys a bit, and everyone should watch closely.

Spawn™ & © 1995 Todd McFarlane Productions, Inc

MALIBU'S BLACK SEPTEMBER



™ & © 1995 Malibu Comics

Will the Ultraverse officially merge with the Marvel Universe? Will the Marvel logo appear on all Ultraverse titles from here on? Will things change or remain the same?

These are the questions Malibu is asking in its own press release. The release goes on, "Get ready for the blackest September of them all — the rumors you hear may be true."

Indeed, it sounds to **Vantage** like they probably are. It seems Black September may be used to more fully integrate Malibu into the Marvel universe. With Malibu sales lower than they once were, this is a move that would make some sense.

Rather than have issue numbers, all of the Malibu issues being published in September will be labeled "Infinity" books. The kick-off is **Black September: Infinity,** followed by **Exiles: Infinity, Mantra: Infinity, Night Man: Infinity, Prime: Infinity, Rune: Infinity, Siren: Infinity,** and **Ultraforce: Infinity.**

UltraForce™ & © Malibu Comics

This "infinity" storyline is the "aftershock" following **Ultra-Force/Avengers.** Several characters move back and forth between the two universes.

A new Mantra is introduced in **Mantra: Infinity.** This book was always weighed down by the fact that Mantra was a man in a woman's body. Thus, this first appearance of the new Mantra could become important.

Ultraforce: Infinity may introduce a new "Fantastic UltraForce Four," says Malibu. **Prime: Infinity** features a Prime/Spidey team-up and Kevin transforms into Spider-Prime. (Then he'll be cloned — heh heh.)

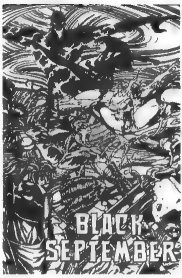
The weird part of all of these Infinity books is that they don't say "infinity" on the cover art

> Will the Ultraverse officially merge with the Marvel Universe?

Clearly, Malibu is looking to boost sales by reminding the readers of the first "new" X-Men

Malibu has provided. But these are truly the covers.

Perhaps most interesting is the **Exiles: Infinity.** Looking a lot like an X-book, its cover features Juggernaut reaching for the reader under a title that screams ... "The All New Exiles." Clearly, Malibu is looking to boost sales by reminding the readers of the first "new" X-Men book published, #94, which proclaimed an "all new" X-Men. But its not all hype — this is a new Marvel mutant team that's been exiled to the Malibu universe. We could easily see more of this mutant team in the future. — and **Exiles: Infinity** is the first appearance. (Thank goodness Topps is publishing **X-Files** instead of Marvel — **Vantage** wonders if the bullpen would turn it into a mutant book too.)



Artwork™ & © 1996 Malibu Comics

Perelman Buys Movie Magazine

The movie magazine *Premiere* has been sold to a joint venture of New World Communications and Hachette Filipacchi Magazines. New World is controlled by billionaire Ronald Perelman, who owns 80% of Marvel stock and has been aggressively acquiring other entertainment companies lately.

New World will use the *Premiere* trademark and editorial content in the development of television programming.

Perelman shook up the TV industry last May when he orchestrated a deal with Rupert Murdoch's Fox Broadcasting Co. that gave the Fox network 12 new affiliates, at the expense of the older TV networks, in exchange for a $500 million investment in Perelman's New World Communications.

Perelman then hired former NBC entertainment chief Brandon Tartikoff to run New World's production operations, which oversees the development of new Marvel characters for future Fox children's programs. Perelman, through MacAndrews & Forbes, also controls Revlon Group.

Scarlet Spider™ & © 1996 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

Conan Takes On Rune

As a celebration of 25 years of publication by Marvel Comics, original **Conan** artist Barry Windsor-Smith will return to pencil the hero (Conan) he drew many years before and the one he co-created more recently (Rune) as the two go head to head.

"**Conan vs. Rune** will be the hardest, meanest, dirtiest, keenest, butt-kicking, sword-sticking, head-choppin', bloodiest, muddiest, in-your-face comic book event of 1995," said **Conan** Editor Mike Lackey.

The story follows three installments in **Conan** #4 (background), **Rune vs. Conan** #1 (main story), and **Conan the Savage** #4 (20 years later). The story centers on Conan's learning of trouble in Turan, where Rune is, as Conan figures he can steal Rune's infamous shards. All three titles are scheduled for a September release.

Conan™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc., Rune™ & © 1995 Malibu Comics

Peter David Satirizes Comics In Soulsearchers and Company

Soulsearchers and Company #13, published by Claypool Comics, will feature a story done by Peter David (DC's **Aquaman**) and Richard Howell (Claypool's **Deadbeats**), with pencils by Dave Cockrum (**X-Men**).

Soulsearchers and Company tells the story of a group of supernatural investigators who have supernatural powers themselves. The book does parodies of different subjects, from children's fairy tales to DC's **Sandman.** It is scheduled for a late July release.

DaiTales™ & © 1995 DC Comics

Entity's Metal Militia To Have Jae Lee Cover

August will see the release of **Metal Militia,** a new mini-series from Entity Comics. The first issue of the mini-series will have a cover drawn by artist Jae Lee (**Hellshock**) The art for the mini-series will be from acclaimed artist Hoang Nguyen (**Punisher, Warstrike**). **Metal Militia** kicks off Entity's Heatwave: Phase Two promotion for this summer.

Two Giants In Comics Go Head To Head

Marvel and DC are going head to head, although not with each other (this time). Rather, two of their characters will fight it out: Galactus and Darkseid in **Darkseid vs. Galactus: The Hunger.**

The story centers around the battle between the two as the Silver Surfer — still a herald of Galactus — leads him to Apokolips. Darkseid, however, will not stand-by and let his planet be devoured. The two are drawn into a massive struggle that will shake the very foundations of the universe. **The Hunger** will be written and illustrated by John Byrne.

Of course **Vantage** told you this was coming many months ago, and now here it is all nice and official. Gee, we sure are smart.

Kabuki to Appear in Entity's Gensaga: Ancient Warrior #1

Entity Comics has announced that **Kabuki**, the popular dark heroine from Caliber and creator David Mack, will be featured in a pin-up gallery in the Entity title **Gensaga: Ancient Warrior #1**. Also featured in the gallery are Mack's supporting characters, The Noh, a lethal band of female assassins. **Gensaga: Ancient Warrior** is a new samurai action/adventure from Raff Ienco, a rising talent from Canada.

Big Entertainment Marketing Director Leaves Company

Marketing Director John Taddeo, who was a key player in designing the Tekno launch, is no longer with the company.

Dawn Looks Like A Winner

Dawn, a wonderfully rendered character from Joe Linsner, gets her own title in July. Thanks to the great art, the expected low print run, and the built-in fan following from Cry For Dawn (see interview), this title could be hot.

Although Dawn has appeared on a variety of covers, her first appearance in a story was **Drama** #1 from Cry For Dawn.

Married To Vantage!

"Vantage gives me an advantage with my customers. It's excellent."
- Jan Sapp, Comic Chest, Virginia Beach, VA

"I read Vantage but I don't read Wizard."
- Donald A. Sapp, Comic Chest, Virginia Beach, VA

VANTAGE
COMIC & CARD PICKS

NON-SPORTS PICKS

APOLOGY AND WARNING

A few months ago **Vantage** had the **Spawn** trading cards as one of our top picks. Imagine our horror when the cards arrived and the chase cards were, well, regular cards with chase card NUMBERS on the back. These cards were essentially dead on arrival as a result, and fans were very disappointed, both in the art (which featured far too few pictures by Todd and some hideous borders that washed out the art-work) and the poor quality of the chase sets. Frantic communications with WildStorm Productions verified that the decision to not use any enhancements on the chase cards was made by the folks who work with Todd McFarlane, explaining why a company that had formerly produced killer chase cards (WildStorm, WildC.A.T.S, etc.) had dropped a dud on the marketplace. Just goes to show ya, there's no sure thing out there.

ANOTHER BAD GIRL MAKES GOOD?

One of the few successes in the card market last year was the Lady Death Chromium cards; at the present time almost everybody is out of packs, and boxes are fetching nearly double their original cost. This summer brings another card set that appears to have many of the same features that made LD a success: Comic Images is releasing the **Shi All-Chromium Collector Cards.** The art on the covers of the first five issues of Shi has been enough to produce runaway sell-outs for the comics, and **Vantage** expects all those Shi fans to follow the artwork to the upcoming card set. Comic Images will be supplying the standard goodies, including six MagnaChrome chase cards (**Vantage** sure hopes they look better than the pink chases in recent CI chromium sets), a rare three-card subset (which will be characters other than Shi!), a limited-edition medallion card, and (watch the heat on this one!) 500 autographed cards.

One of the few successes last year was the Lady Death cards; now Comic Images is releasing the Shi All-Chromium Collector Cards.

Be sure to watch for the special binder for these cards — it includes a six-card mini-press sheet, and should sell out quickly.

VANTAGE Card Picks
Shi All-Chromium Collector Cards
X-Files Season 1 Trading Cards
Paul Chadwick Fantasy Art Cards

FROM CULT TV TO SMASH SUCCESS

X-Files. Don't you wish you had more copies of **X-Files** #1? It may be too late for the comic, but this summer Topps brings us the **X-Files: Season One** trading cards, and if you blink you may miss them. Granted, dealers will be more aware of the cards than they might have been if they were issued a year ago, but it remains to be seen if they order enough cards to meet demand. The set is a small one, only 72 cards, but there is also a special foil set that is made up of cards that occur once per pack. Chase cards include six foil cards featuring cover art from the comics and four Topps Finest photo chase cards.

These cards will appeal to a larger audience than almost any other set released this

month (due to the viewership of the show), and the cards are timed for release just about the time the show returns from summer reruns. **Vantage** is a little concerned that Topps appears to show up with additional boxes of cards once sets become hits (where did all those extra boxes of Vampirella cards come from in May?), but strong fan demand should help bolster sales.

Once again, there is an album! Not only does it have artwork on the front and back, but it contains the elusive #0 card (an exclusive to this binder). You should also keep an eye out for promo cards for the set — **Vantage** has only seen one, and it was card number three!

JUST A QUIET, CALM PIECE OF BEAUTY

From time to time **Vantage** points out comics that should be read, and the next card set gives us a chance to mention **Concrete** comics from Paul Chadwick. There is a limited, signed and numbered hardcover book containing all the early Concrete stories floating around at an extremely reasonable price (about $40 from stores that thought to order some), and it shows how comics can truly capture a far wider range of subject matter than most people expect.

The card set is coming from a totally unexpected source: FPG. The painted cards will feature artwork other than Concrete, and about 35 of the 90 cards will feature new art. Five chase cards should prove very difficult to come by, and FPG has announced its intention to limit production to the initial orders received. Please be sure to take a look at a set before they're all gone — you will probably find the set touches a quiet part of your heart that has been overlooked lately.

GONE, BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

We may not have Bloom County to look forward to every morning, and many parts of the country haven't had its weaker shadow Outland for a long time, but coming this summer is a set of cards that might briefly give us back the special smiles they gave us in another decade long ago. Krome Productions is going to produce a chromium card set with what may be an industry first: a chromium sticker set to go with it (Ren and Stimpy were prisms, not chromium). Oh sure, there are chase cards, and there are mystery cards (this is the same company that did Lady Death cards), but it would take all the fun out of it if we knew all about the set — most of the fun is opening packs and finding new smiles, even if it costs $2 a pack.

PS: There's a binder with an extra card; it's too expensive ($20+), but be sure to sneak a peek at somebody else's binder when you get a chance.

SPECULATIVE CORNER

How would you react to a card set that features Spider-Man and the X-Men and the Tick? **Vantage** expects that most dealers are reacting with a yawn because the cards are in a set called the **Fleer Ultra Fox Kids Network Cards.** These cards are a little cheaper than most recent

Fleer releases ("only" $1.50 per pack), but that may still be too high for the little kids who want them — they can usually con their parents out of a buck, but that extra fifty cents may doom the cards. On the other hand, older fans of the Tick might be willing to pay for cards featuring their favorite, and **Vantage** is sure that any Tick chase cards will fetch more of a premium than any Spider-Man chases in the set.

Star Trek: Voyager ™ & © 1995 Paramount, Inc.

QUICK NOTES

FPG is testing us: how much is too much? The **Larry Elmore Colossal** cards might have an autograph card in every box, but how do you talk consumers into paying $10 a pack for five cards? You can't even get two sets out of a box (18 packs per box), so dealers can't make any money busting the boxes unless they shell out almost $300 for two boxes and get incredibly lucky enough to: (a) put three sets together out of two boxes; (b) sell the autographed cards for $35 or more; and (c) find three people willing to pay $100 each for a set of fifty cards. **Vantage** is reminded of the scene in the movie Big where somebody asks the question, "What kind of kid spends $25 for a comic book?" Or for that matter, $100 for a set of new cards...

Tired of **Pocahontas** yet? If not, you can pick up a collector's tin from SkyBox that has a limited set of fifty oversized cards (similar to the Lion King set except that it should be cheaper for a change).

They haven't made sets out of all the Star Trek episodes yet — this time we get the **Next Generation Episode Collection Season III.** No real word on the types of chase cards yet, but you can probably count on a few rare holograms and/or SkyMotion cards. Sales should be slightly lower than the Season Two cards, and long-term they'll probably become just another $5 set sitting on the tables at most Flea Markets and shows.

On the other hand, Skybox is also releasing a special 98 card set of Star Trek Voyager, which features a randomly packed Emergency Holographic Doctor hologram (and we all saw that one coming, right?), an exchange card for the Skymotion U.S.S. Voyager card and the 9 Spectra-Etch character cards. Don't expect to get rich off this set, as the show still hovers at the bottom of the ratings galaxy.

Gil Elvgren had a really nice, nostalgic set of cards released by Comic Images last year, so it's a bit of a surprise that 21st Century is releasing the **Elvgren Pinups** cards this month. As before, there is no nudity in the set, and older collectors who remember the originals will no doubt snap up sets as soon as they see them. It is much more difficult to find 21st Century sets in the after-market, so be sure to order these initially rather than waiting to find them cheaper later on.

AAAHH!!! No, that's not **Vantage**'s reaction to one of this month's releases, it's simply the name of the **Real Monsters** cards from Fleer. Based on the Nickelodeon animated series, these cards feature, well, lots of monsters. Clearly a niche product.

Michael Whelan is one of the most honored artists in the science fiction community, but his first card set was just sort of there — his brilliant paintings somehow lost their magic when transferred to the smaller medium of cards. Comic Images is going to try again with **Other Worlds: Michael Whelan II** cards, and **Vantage** hopes that they can figure out what went wrong the first time.

THE

VANTAGE™

GUIDE TO FINDING

Chase Cards

Have you ever noticed that some people are incredibly lucky at finding chase cards? Or that some dealers seem to have the really hard-to-find chase cards even though they don't have any single cards or sets? **Vantage** knows full well it isn't always luck, and we're going to share some of our secrets with you! After spending endless hours opening boxes of cards (just wait till the publisher gets the bill for "research" this month!), we are ready to arm you with a series of detection methods that will leave you ready to go out and search a few boxes of cards yourself. Of course, we also have a few suggestions for dealers that will make your search more difficult, so pay close attention.

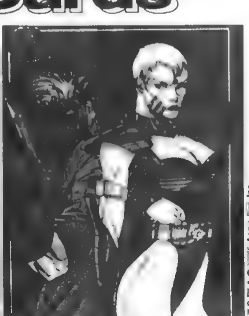
The Odds Aren't Random

The problem the card industry faces is that there is no good way to randomly insert chase cards in a box — usually the packs are machine collated, and there is some mechanical way that chase cards are inserted into the boxes. This may mean inserting one every so many packs if that can be automated, or preparing packs with and without chase cards and somehow inserting these special packs into the boxes. There doesn't seem to be an easy way to randomly grab a chase card when creating packs.

As a result of the methods apparently used, the chase cards are inserted mechanically, at pre-defined points, and the cards can be found using simple counting techniques. Otherwise, the packs might be slightly different as a result of the chase cards packs being prepared at a different time than the rest of the packs in the box, and this makes them easy to find.

Vantage will also examine a few less obvious methods of finding chase cards, including some that are truly reprehensible.

Keep in mind that **Vantage** has professional card-finders, and be careful about trying these methods at home — you may find dealers will never let you near their store again.



WILDC.A.T.S ™ & © 1995 Image Ent Inc.

Brute Force

This method is brain-dead simple, but it works extremely well. When a new set comes out which has just a few rare cards per box (or a few holograms and lots of chromium chase cards), a dealer can simply open packs until they find the big chase card(s). After that, they switch to a second box, continuing with box after box until they have lots more chase cards than they should. The remaining packs are then put together in a box, and unwary customers buy packs of cards which have little or no chance of a chase card.

More unscrupulous dealers have actually been reported to reseal these boxes and sell them to some customers who may be very, very unhappy when they get home.

Counting Cards

One of the easiest methods of finding chase cards is simply counting the cards in a pack. If

Static ™ & © 1995 Milestone Media, Inc. X-Men ™ & © 1995 Marvel Ent. Group, Inc.

you take the cards in a pack and spread them out by pushing the tops and bottoms of the cards so they are stacked like a parallelogram, you can count them by running your thumbnail across the stack and counting how many times your thumb goes "click." This was first useful with the **Marvel Series One** cards from SkyBox (1990) because the chase cards were inserted in the packs by simply adding an extra card. The big use of this method lately is the chase cards in the **Lion King** boxes — the pop-up cards and the ultra-rare 3-D cards each replaced two cards in the packs, so the lucky packs have one fewer card than the other packs.

Slide, Slide!

Back in the early days of non-sports cards (last year), the regular cards in a deck were not UV-coated, but the chase cards often were. If you held a pack vertically, with the left side between your left thumb and forefinger and the right side between your right thumb and forefinger, your could push down slightly with your thumbs to keep pressure on the pack and push the cards from side to side with your thumbs. **Vantage** recommends the **Ultraverse Series One** cards for practice — there are ten or eleven packs with chase cards in them, and boxes are readily available for five to ten dollars, and the card packs are loose enough to make this kind of testing easy to use. Packs without chase cards make a scrunching sound while packs with chase cards slide like glass. While this method works for most of the early Marvel sets, the big hit comes in **Marvel Series Four** — it will detect the Spider-Man Venom hologram which guides for about $45!

Sliding, Part Two

Because the chase cards are slightly different, or are loaded into the packs in a manner that is slightly different from the regular cards, sometimes a set will be produced that allows a slightly different method of sliding to be used. A good set to practice on is the **WildC.A.T.S.** oversized card set.

Hold the pack resting on your forefingers, and put one thumb on the top of the pack and the other thumb on the bottom of the pack. Push the thumbs towards the middle of the pack. In those packs that have no chase cards, usually nothing special will happen. Those packs with chase cards, however, will have one card that is slightly higher or lower than the other cards, and you will feel that one card push back into line with the other cards. While this method occasionally leaves you with a pack that doesn't have a chase card, it will also identify a large number of packs with chase cards.

Location, Location, Location

A lot of card buyers are superstitious about where in the box they take their cards — many people want the bottom packs, some want the

middle packs, but **Vantage** wants several very specific packs.

For many boxes, including the **Star Wars Galaxy** boxes, the **Ren and Stimpy** boxes, **Batman Animated Adventures** boxes, and even the new **Star Trek Voyager** boxes, **Vantage** has two specific packs it opens before any others. These boxes have four stacks of nine packs each, and viewed from above when the box is first opened they are the upper right, the upper left, the bottom right and the bottom left. **Vantage** starts by opening the second pack from the bottom in the upper left stack and the third pack from the top in the upper right. More times than not there is a chase card in one of these positions, after which **Vantage** looks for the chase card's "date."

Bring A Date With You

Once upon a time in the distant past, people could choose to go to dances either stag (alone) or drag (with a date). **Vantage** is pleased to announce that in a great many boxes of cards, the chase cards never arrive drag. Once a chase card is found, there is usually a second chase card directly next to it — so if the box has only two stacks of eighteen, you simply open the other pack that is the same distance from the top of the box, and if the box has four stacks of nine cards, you simply open the two packs immediately adjacent to the chase card pack.

This method is successful in a wide variety of card sets, including the **Vampirella** cards, the first **Star Trek Master** series, the **Star Trek Voyager** cards, etc.

The Zone Offense

This is similar to the "date" method just described, and works for nearly every release from FPG, most of the Comic Images boxes, and far more. Rather than being directly next to each other, the chase cards are merely close to each other.

Open one stack of nine, stopping when you find a chase card. Note how many packs from the top you stopped at, and then count that far down in each of the other three stacks. Start by opening those three packs, and then move one pack up and down, continuing until you have the two or three chase cards that are likely to be in the box. (FPG boxes generally have three chase cards each, so don't keep opening packs after you find them!)

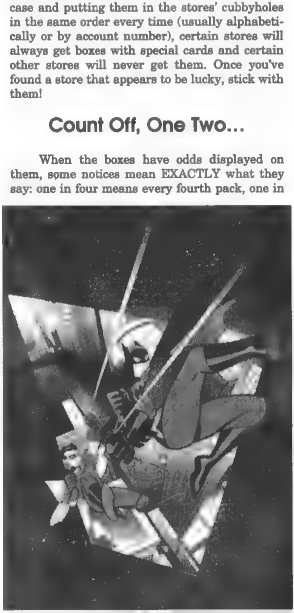
The Good Stuff

Comic Images (CI) has several layers of chase cards for their sets. The big ones generally include a three-card subset, a medallion card, and autographed cards. Card boxes are shipped in cases, and the cases that CI uses tend to have all of the rare cards in the bottom boxes of the case. Obviously, dealers who order cases of cards can then find these cards easily, and then sell the remaining boxes or pack them out to customers who never really have a chance at the expensive cards (this is why some dealers always seem to have those cards).

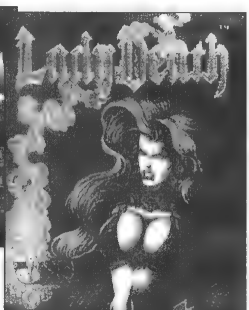
Ironically, this method of shipping the limited cards favors some dealers over others. As a general rule, stores tend to order the same number of boxes of every set CI puts out. Since distributors receive cases of cards, and distribute them to the stores by removing them from the case and putting them in the stores' cubbyholes in the same order every time (usually alphabetically or by account number), certain stores will always get boxes with special cards and certain other stores will never get them. Once you've found a store that appears to be lucky, stick with them!

Count Off, One Two...

When the boxes have odds displayed on them, some notices mean EXACTLY what they say: one in four means every fourth pack, one in



Batman™ & © 1995 DC Comics



Lady Death ™ & © 1995 Brian Pulido. Savage Dragon ™ & © 1995 Erik Larsen.

three means every third pack, etc. Virtually every set put out by Fleer meets this criteria (the Fleer Flairs tend to use "zone" chase cards instead).

A good example is the **Marvel Masterpieces** from 1994. Every sixth pack contains a power blast chase card; every third pack between two power blasts contains a holofoil chase card. Simply open packs until you find a power blast, and then open every third pack.

Not convinced? Okay, grab a box of the **Marvel Metal 1995** cards. Open packs one, four, and seven in each stack and you'll probably find the twelve gold blasters that come in a box.

Need more? How about the ultra-expensive **Batman Forever Metal** cards. Open every other pack and you'll get a chase card. This will miss the hologram cards from the box, but you'll get all the other chase cards easily.

Just Check Out the Pack, Jack

Modern sets have multiple pack displays, usually four different ones (but some have had as many as six different designs). In addition, sometimes the boxes have different pictures as well. As a result of the way the chase cards are inserted, sometimes you can find the chase cards by examining the artwork on the card packs.

One of the earlier sets to display this method was the **Plasm** cards. While the cards may not be worth much now, at one time the chase cards were in heavy demand and the second-level chase cards fetched quite a premium. There were four different box designs, and four different pack designs. For a given box, the chase cards were in specific pack designs; for two of the designs they matched the box, and for the other two they were switched. (Since boxes now sell for about $6, the determination of which packs had chases in which boxes is left as an exercise for the reader).

A more important set is the **1994 Spider-Man** cards from Fleer. There were four pack designs, and the Suspended Animation cards came one in every four packs (you should see this coming!), so for a given box you could open four packs to find out which design is the winner, after which you would open all the packs with that design. This would miss the two holograms, but it would find nine chase cards easily.

Secret Markings

Some day when you're really bored, spend some time examining card packs. The typical pack has all kinds of neat stuff: crimped lines, black markings, boxes, etc., most of which seem to have little reason to exist. The most prominent of these markings is the black boxes — on the back of the packs, there appears to be a big black rectangle at the top and/or bottom, usually near the center of the top and/or bottom. These mysterious markings sometimes are all lined-up, and sometimes move gradually so that the mark is mostly at the top or mostly at the bottom.

But sometimes they don't. Every now and then the mark jumps dramatically for one pack, and then returns to the pattern. Guess what's inside the pack with the strange box? Good guess, a chase card.

To really see this easily, **Vantage** recommends the **Beverly Hillbilly** movie cards — you would have to be blind to not pick out the chase

cards in the box. Once armed with an idea of how these markings work, pick up virtually any Comic Images box and have at it. While this doesn't always find all the chase cards in the boxes, it works a frightening amount of the time, particularly on the ultra-rare cards.

Backs of the Packs

As mentioned, some of the packs have some really strange markings. The **Ken Kelly Series One** cards have some scrunch lines on the back that line up for every pack in the box except for the packs with the chase cards (after this early mistake, FPG recovered and started putting the same crimp lines on all the packs). The **Simpsons Series One** cards have some light waves in the metal on the back that line up except for those with the chase cards.

Sometimes the backs of the packs have metal lines of various widths at the end of the wrapper that run down the middle of the card pack. The widths vary from pack to pack, but sometimes they change dramatically — as with the Sandman packs which had the ultra-rare holograms.

That Touchie-Feelie Business

The **Vertigo** cards from SkyBox had some beautiful chase cards — nicely painted, with ridged metal borders framing the pictures. Unfortunately, the chase cards were always the bottom card in the pack, and running your thumb along the bottom edge would reveal the cards instantly. As a result, there was no way to sell packs of these cards once word got around — there was little chance that any of the chase cards could still be in packs that customers were allowed to touch.

What's that — you thought the **Death SkyDisk** would still be a draw? Sorry, but by holding the pack in one hand and pushing down on the middle of the pack with your other thumb you could easily find the SkyDisk (the disk doesn't easily bend the same way the other cards do. It was this major defect in the chase cards that inspired **Vantage** to produce this column.

Ravage 2099 ™ & © 1995 Marvel Ent. Group Inc.

Desperate Measures

If you can believe it, some dealers stooped to using stud finders on early card sets to find Spectra-edged cards. Fortunately, the foil packs used now tend to defeat this method.

Balance scales can be useful when the chase cards are lighter or heavier than the regular cards. Note that **Vantage** said "Balance Scales" — absolute weights are difficult to read and compare, but balance scales determine lighter and heavier very easily.

What's A Dealer To Do?

The most important thing for a dealer to do is actually very simple: shuffle the packs when you open a box. Immediately. Preferably in plain view of a horde of customers.

It is also important that customers not be allowed to handle the packs, but they still want to have a chance to "pick out" their own packs so that they can brag about (or complain about) their luck. Simply pull out a handful of packs and ask them to select a few without letting them actually handle the packs. Alternately, if the packs have different covers (as is common with all the recent Fleer packs and sets from a number of other companies as well), ask them which pack cover they'd like.

When the pack pictures reveal the chase cards, either mix together several boxes that have different mixtures (which is hard to do), or separate the packs into "chase card packs" and "non-chase card packs." Then, instead of charging $1.50 a pack for 36 packs of the 1994 **Amazing Spider-man** cards ($54 total), charge $3 a pack for those with chase cards ($27 for nine packs) and $1 for the other 27 packs which have a small chance of chase cards (another $27). Different price mixes would result from different mixes of chase and non-chase packs (thus, for the **Batman** metal packs you could charge $4 for chase card packs and $2 for packs that have a small chance of getting a hologram).

To get a good chance at cards that appear less than once per box, consider ordering boxes from multiple distributors — while the odds of getting one special chase card in ten boxes would remain the same, the odds of getting more than one go up dramatically (after all, if a chase card appears only once per ten boxes, there will be only one in a ten-box case, but there may be more than one in ten boxes if three or four each come from different cases).

Buying Packs—Whom Do You Trust?

A bigger problem faces people who are trying to buy packs of cards from dealers — how can you find a dealer who can be trusted? The easiest way is to stick around and see if customers get chase cards from packs the dealer sells as often as would be expected. Have you ever seen the dealer open a new box? Do they shuffle the packs? Even though the dealer may not be raiding the boxes, other customers may be, so don't buy packs if you can touch them (unless, of course, you just saw the box opened and not shuffled — feel free to pick it clean yourself).

Other things to watch for — does the dealer have single cards and/or sets which would result from the number of chase cards that they have? If not, they may be raiding the boxes before they sell packs to the public.

About the only dependable method is to buy sealed boxes — so save up for the next set you want to get; after all, sealed boxes are usually much cheaper than a box full of single packs.

What really needs to be done?

Attention, all card companies: *STOP MAKING IT SO EASY TO FIND THE CHASE CARDS.*

internet.picks

Elves on the Internet

As of April 15, 1995, the fantasy comic book series **Elfquest** joined the growing community of publishers and titles that are featured on the **World Wide Web** on the Internet.

What makes the **Elfquest** web site different from all others, according to Warp Graphics Publisher Richard Pini, is that **Elfquest** is the first comic book property to have a dedicated Internet gateway (elfquest.com) that serves no other function than to make **Elfquest** available to anyone in the world with Internet access.

"There are other web **home pages** that carry information about this or that comic book publisher or title," Pini said. "What makes elfquest.com and its associated Web pages different and unique is the wide range of services and information that we've packed into the site. I honestly don't know of another comic book property that has been given such red carpet treatment on the Internet."

The address for the **Elfquest** web home page is http://www.elfquest.com.

Batman Web Site Uses Cool Gotham Skyline

Batman Forever, the third Bat-movie, opened on June 16. But the web site was online May 15. Just by hooking up to the Internet and clicking a few buttons, you can practically open up the whole movie on your computer screen.

There's all the regular stuff — artwork, promotional videos, and behind the swoons glimpses at the making of Batman Forever, but the really cool part is the design and flow of the site. It's pretty darn creative ...

The Skyline

The first screen is an image of the Gotham City skyline (compete with swooping Bat-signal), which serves as the main menu for the whole thing. The really neat part is that you look over the buildings of the Gotham skyline and use them to choose where you want to go.

Want to visit the Gotham Library? Click on the Library in the skyline. You'll quickly have ac-

TOP PICKS

Elfquest Web Site
(http://www.elfquest.com)

Batman Forever Web Site
(http://batmanforever.com)

NUMBER ONE-I AM NOT HUMAN!
NUMBER TWO-I HAPPEN TO BE GORGEOUS!
AND NUMBER THREE--
IF YOU DON'T LEARN SOME MANNERS, THEY BETTER NOT LET YOU GRADUATE!

ElfQuest™ & © 1995 Warp Graphics, Inc.

Home Page: The home page is the main screen of a company's web site that you can visit on the Internet. The home page will often have a variety of buttons that you can click on with your mouse to visit other interesting graphical features available on the Internet.

cess to production notes from the film, cast bios, and a look at the DC Comics adaption. The Gotham Gallery building contains photos of the major characters from the film. You can even download Two-Face. Want to get rid of some E-Mail pest? Send 'em a picture of Two Face, that's gotta work.

Use the Gotham City Post Office to send fan mail to the stars. (Chances they read it? We vote slim. But enjoy the fantasy if you like.) Or, take a trip over to the Gotham Cinema to view its film segments, or visit Radio Gotham to hear samples of the soundtrack.

Help!

Here's a cute addition. Lost at the site? Need some help? Who you gonna call? Why, Alfred, of course. The entire Help system is Alfred-based. What a great butler!

Problems accessing the site should be reported to: webmaster@pathfinder.com.

World Wide Web: Developed in 1990 in Switzerland, the web has quickly become one of the main methods used to access the Internet. It is a link between the computers of the world in a graphical, user-friendly way. Using the web you can "visit" a company's computer, seeing pictures of art or other things. You can even interact with the company's computer by pushing buttons with your mouse – sort of like at a cash machine.

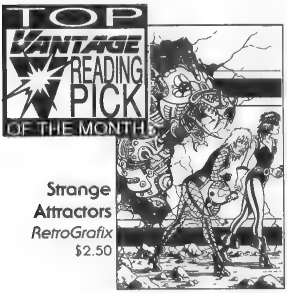
The Hidden Stuff at Batman Online!

The best part of this site is the hidden stuff! Poke around the city and you'll find clues left by the Riddler — leading you to Claw Island! Claw Island is the Riddler's Headquarters in the film. Here, you can download audio clips of the trickster's clips — put 'em on your answering machine! The Riddler quizzes visitors with a series of riddles, which if answered correctly, can lead one to ...

The Batcave! In your journey to the secretive, subterranean hideout of Batman, buried deep beneath Wayne Manor — you'll encounter vehicles, gadgetry, and arsenals! Alfred will have you sign the guest book, which will enter you in a drawing to win a crew jacket. (Okay, so the prize sucks. Tell you what, send us a picture of you wearing the jacket and we'll give you a lifetime sub to Starship Online™, a new net mag from **Vantage**. Nice segue, eh?)

COMICS ARE FOR READING First!

By Rich Keller



Hello, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to my tenth annual science fiction comic review column! You know, we've had some great times together in this column. Gosh, I remember the time I gave the "Great Bird of the Galaxy" (Gene Roddenberry to all you lay people) the idea for **Star Trek: The Next Generation**. And then there was that hilarious **X-Files** story about... Excuse me? I've only been writing this column for over a year? You mean I'm not Peter David? Wait, wait, let me show you some ID! No, I haven't taken my medication recently. Why do you ask? Well, anyway, here's this month's reviews. My, what a pretty white jacket. How come the zippers are in the back?

What do **Mystery in Space** and **Love & Rockets** have in common other than being two fine comic books? Absolutely,totally, nothing. Unless you consider the influence they both had on Michael Cohen. It seems Mike was looking through some pre-Love & Rockets portfolio work that artist Jamie Hernandez had drawn. He came upon some drawings that resembled retro-1950s cities of the future. This, combined with his formative years reading DC's **Mystery in Space,** gave Mike, and his co-conspirator Mark Sherman, the idea for **Strange Attractors**.

The story is pretty simple. It's your typical boy-meets-girl, boy-gets-possessed, boy-leaves-girl, girl's-friend-marries-possessed-boy, girl's-friend-gets-kidnapped, girl-meets-space pirate comic book story line. However, if you need a little more information than that... **Strange Attractors** is part 1950s' sci-fi parody, part action adventure, part soap opera, part court drama, and part comic-within-a-comic. Excuse me, my head is smoking right now. As you can see, Cohen and Sherman put a lot of stuff into their comic, but not so much that you can get lost (I mean, c'mon, it's not like an **X-Men** book).

This book has plenty going for it. First, for a change of pace, the characters are all women.

Strange Attractors is part 1950s sci-fi parody, part action/adventure, part soap opera, part court drama, and part comic-within-a-comic.

Now, plenty of books have women as their main characters, but we're not talking about the standard narrow-waisted, big chested, large semi-automatic weapon wielding women that grace some of today's comics. Cohen draws his women petite. What they lack in the body department, they gain in the personality area. Each of the characters in this book has her own distinct personality. Sophie, the main character, is almost a loner, having the job to catalog all of the rooms in the Museum of Lost Things. She also tends to live in the world of her favorite comic book heroines, namely Nurse Nebula, from whom Sophie tends to get her advice, Pirate Peg, the other main character, and another favorite comic hero of Sophie's, who was once a strong woman, but she has betrayed her band of cohorts, and is now defeated. She helps Sophie try to find her kidnapped friend while trying to find her own courage once again. These women aren't cardboard cut-outs, they mimic feelings that some people would have out here in the real world.

One of the other things that makes this book good is how it goes a little overboard in naming all of the items in this future universe. Hasqueryx fumes, Xanthropus Root, Quyrf, The Yggransil, just to name a few. In some places it looks like their word processor threw up. But, of course, that's the way it was when Mystery in Space and Strange Adventures were in their glory days. And just think, if they hadn't written this way back in the early days of science fiction, we probably wouldn't be talking about Klingons, and phase coil inducers, and inverted warp bubbles today.

Do you miss the days of good ol' science fiction stories? Are you tired of reading comics about women who have a grudge against every single man in the universe? Strange Attractors may be your cure for the comic blues.

OK, you've heard of the soap opera: that would be stuff like **Melrose Place, Guiding Light**, the O.J. Simpson Trial. And you've heard of science fiction: that would be **Star Wars, Star Trek**, the O.J. Simpson Trial. (Oops, that would be fantasy, wouldn't it?) Well, true-believing **Vantage** readers, let me introduce you to the Mullkons and the first space soap opera to come to the comics — **Mullkon Empire**.

Based on a concept by sci-fi writer John Jakes, and scripted by Kate Worley, the story involves a family of interstellar... **trash haulers**. Yes, you heard what I said. They're garbage men, but extremely wealthy garbage men. They started hauling toxic waste during the late 1990s on Earth and have expanded operations on an intergalactic scale, hauling space debris in every shape and form into the black holes that seemingly pop up around our galaxy. Sure, they're not the Carringtons of Dynasty (what was their money maker anyway?), but hey, don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

In his notes at the end of the first issue,

John Jakes said the Mullkons are a combination of "I, Claudius meets Dallas five hundred years in the future." You could replace Dallas with any family-oriented soap opera and his statement would still have the same meaning. It's the story of how money and power can corrupt many generations of a family. And, just like in many soap operas, it can also destroy the family fabric in the process.

Many of the Mullkons can be interposed with characters from some of your favorite television soaps. There's Kai Mullkon, the Blake Carrington of the family, who's main concern is that the job be finished, no matter what the cost and who he has to step over. Rafaello is the Bobby Ewing of the clan — he wants to make the money, but he wants to make sure that the way he makes it is on the up and up. Then there's Azore, the outcast, who was conceived by a Terran mother and alien father (of course, that may be totally impossible, but hey, if they can do it on Star Trek...). Azore is Claudius in I, Claudius. While the other members of his family think of him as the ugly duckling, he knows that with time and his intelligence he will have an opportunity to rule his family. How well he does is anyone's guess.

Tekno•Comix is definitely leading the way in creating some very intriguing science fiction. **Mullkon Empire** is no exception. Hopefully, the Mullkons will live a long and prosperous life. And, who knows, in a few years we could be asking the question "Who Shot Kai Mullkon?"

DAWN ™ & © 1995 Joseph Linsner

THE COMING OF A NEW DAWN

By Corey Bond

"If you go inch by inch, Wonder Woman is wearing less clothes than Dawn," insists Joseph Michael Linsner, defending his Bad Girl goddess. "It's practically the same thing with Vampirella. You never hear anybody complain about Vampirella."

Best known as the cover girl on the anthology comic book **Cry For Dawn**, Linsner's photo-realistic femme fatale is now the star of her own miniseries. Dawn, a five-issue storyline beginning in July, will be published bimonthly by Sirius Entertainment, Linsner's new home since the disbanding of Cry For Dawn Productions.

Joseph Linsner is happy to turn the publishing reins over to Sirius. "Cry For Dawn was just two guys, and Sirius is a much larger operation. As an artist I'm given a lot more freedom to sit back and concentrate on producing comic books. Whereas at Cry For Dawn we had to juggle so many other things... helping to do production work on all the other books we were publishing, things like that. That actually got very chaotic and put a damper on my own personal creativity, in terms of being able to concentrate on doing my own stories."

Utilizing his newfound freedom, Linsner has turned his efforts away from the horror short stories he once did in the **Cry For Dawn** anthologies. He now devotes his energy to his first extended storyline, exploring the world of the Dawn character.

Originally, Dawn's sole purpose was to appear on the covers of **Cry For Dawn** and, like many other Bad Girls, help sell the books. Never appearing in any of the stories, she remained shrouded in mystery. Her demeanor varied, but the symbols surrounding her remained constant: a thorned rose, a chain, and "the horned god Death, the guy that's always groping her."

The significance of the symbols are vague. "Depending on the context... the rose could be Heaven or it could be Hell, and the same thing with the chain." Linsner always strove to create "that ambiguity that dances between the light and the shadows."

As Linsner allowed his unconscious to run wild, filling the "blank slate" of the covers any way he wanted, different "weird elements" began to manifest. The various front and back cover paintings began to portray a saga all their own. "They've been working together to form a giant web of a storyline." Eventually, Dawn's

"If you go inch by inch, Wonder Woman is wearing less clothes than Dawn," insists Joseph Michael Linsner, defending his Bad Girl goddess, Dawn, "It's practically the same thing with Vampirella. You never hear anybody complain about Vampirella."

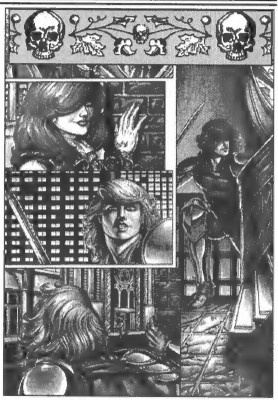
true identity began to suggest itself.

"Once I got up to Cry For Dawn number six or seven, a very definite storyline was beginning to take form in my head." Readers were curious, but Linsner refused to betray Dawn's secrets. "Originally she seemed a lot darker, a lot closer to a witch. People would write in to ask if she was a witch or a vampire. I didn't want to define her because I wasn't quite sure of where I wanted to angle the stuff."

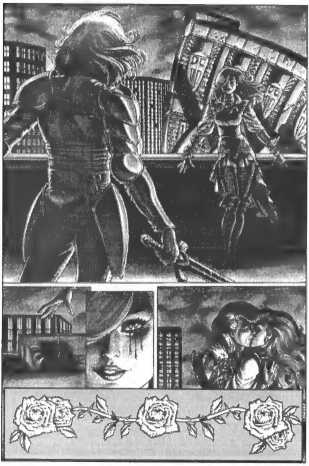
As Dawn continued to appear in increasingly bizarre settings on the covers of **Cry For Dawn**, Linsner began doing research into different mythologies. When it finally came time to tell Dawn's story, the theme took a religious turn.

"All of my work is derived from my passions or my hatreds. A lot of that deals with religion on different levels. In a way, religion defines our reality, or it offers up different explanations for our reality." Linsner, as a New Yorker born in 1968, began to notice the discrepancies between what the churches "served up as reality" and real life. "The difference between what I was told and what I was feeling really sparked my quest."

The character chosen to pursue Linsner's quest is Darrian Ashoka, "the guy who is more or less the hero of the Dawn series." His first appearance is in a scene Linsner painted for the back cover of Cry For Dawn Productions' **Subtle Violents #1**. Staged differently, the same scene appears in the first issue of **Dawn**. "Darrian Ashoka is a pilgrim, the Everyman who is on a quest, and Dawn is the tour guide."



DAWN ™ & © 1995Joseph Michael Linsner



The first meeting between Ashoka and his tour guide to the cosmos appeared in Sirius Entertainment's **Drama #1**, which was published last summer. This fully painted one-shot revealed Dawn to be the Goddess of Birth and Rebirth.

"There has always been a strong relationship between mother goddesses and fertility goddesses and death deities, or whatever. It's all a Yin/Yang, life and death thing. Dawn evolved into that, and it seemed natural that she does have a connection to her romance with the darker elements."

Like **Drama**, the **Dawn** mini-series will also be fully painted by Linsner. He expects it will likely be his last painted work, "because it takes too damn long." Linsner is pleased with his first experimentation with computer coloring. Eleven or One, originally a black and white story in his **Angry Christ Comics** paperback, was computer colored and published as a one-shot in May. This was the first time he had allowed anyone else to color his work. "I guess as I'm getting older I'm loosening up a little bit, whereas once upon a time I was an insane control freak."

Fans of Linsner's beautiful work will be treated to a cornucopia of his art this summer with the release of a 90-card set from Comic Images. "The actual title of the card set is **Joseph Michael Linsner: Dawn and Beyond,** and Dawn takes up, I'd say, forty percent of it. Forty to fifty percent. The rest of it is a lot of the other weird things I've been drawing over the years. There's some light-hearted, cartoon-type shots that I'm sure nobody would've expected from me." Fans who are already Linsner completists will still want to collect the set. "Out of the entire bunch there's going to be thirty to forty brand new pieces that have never seen print before."

Another character included in the **Dawn and Beyond** set is Obsidian Stone. Card collectors may remember him as Linsner's contribution to the **Creator's Universe** card set. It is possible that Linsner will do an Obsidian Stone comic series after finishing the current **Dawn** storyline. "Maybe before I do a second Dawn storyline I'll jump on him."

Linsner promises that we will definitely be seeing more of Dawn after the current five-issue mini-series. "She doesn't die in the end or anything." Also expect to see the veil of mystery lifted, at least partially. "As the Dawn story goes on, I will be giving out answers. Some people are threatening to beat the hell out of me if I don't."

What else can we expect from Joseph Linsner? "As things go on, I'm going to try to highlight my lighter side. At one time, one of the other movements I was lumped into was 'Gore Hound.' I was never happy with that. It really bothered me." An example of Linsner's humorous departure appears in **Safety-Belt Man #4,** in collaboration with Robb Horan. "In there I did a story called 'Safety-Belt Man Meets Lady Def.' It's kind of my take on the whole 'Bad Girl' thing. She's got a big white afro."

Linsner's first published comics work appeared in **Continuum #1**, featuring a character named The Dark, now being published by August House. "I did a little short story in there which I will reprint at some point." **Continuum #1**, published in 1988, also has the distinction of carrying the very first ad for **Cry For Dawn #1**, which came out in December 1989. All of which means that Joseph Linsner has been a part of the comics industry for about seven years now. "...that sounds terrifying, but yeah, I guess that's true. I started when I was around eighteen. I'm starting to feel like an old man because of that." Linsner is indeed the "old man" of the "Bad Girl" bunch, even though he is actually younger than all the other creators associated with the trend. That's because Dawn predates "Bad Girl."

"Since 1990 I've been lumped into three or four different cliques, different waves." Linsner has learned to take this sort of thing in stride. "It's the flavor-of-the-month. I'm sure by the end of the summer there will be some new term."

> It's all a Yin/Yang, life and death thing. Dawn evolved into that, and it seemed natural that she does have a connection to her romance with the darker elements.

A veteran to the comics industry, Linsner is upbeat and optimistic about the future of Sirius Entertainment at a time when many other creators are getting panicky. The shake-up of comic distributors and the upheaval of the direct market haven't fazed him. "All the books at Sirius have built up their audience with a minimal amount of hype, because they're concentrating

Art ™ & © 1995 Joseph Michael Linsner

DAWN ™ & © 1995 Joseph Michael Linsner

on doing a good comic.

"I think in the long run, if you're doing a good book, you're going to find your audience, because hard work always pays off. That I take to be a cosmic rule no matter what you apply it to. Hard work will always pay off in the end."

As for the future of his career, Linsner intends to concentrate on the current **Dawn** series for now. "Everything is up for grabs until I finish the Dawn storyline, because I don't want to quit comics after five issues. But I don't think that will happen. I have too much faith in the possibilities and untapped potential of the medium."

I think in the long run, if you're doing a good book, you're going to find your audience.

LINSNER on MARVEL

"I think the market in two years will shift back to exactly what it was before Marvel pulled out. Capital and Diamond and the direct market will be exactly as it was back then, except that Marvel is going to be on the outside. I think Marvel's going to become like Archie Comics, in that Archie comics make up a huge amount of comics that are put out there, but nobody really thinks about Archie Comics as part of the comics industry. They'll be a cross between Archie and Disney, in that Disney has Disney stores for all their merchandising. I think Marvel is probably making all their money from merchandising and TV stuff. They probably couldn't care less if the comic books sell at all. Comic books are only an ancillary thing to toys. As long as they get new comic books out there breaking even, and the toys sell like gangbusters, they'll be happy. In the long run, what everybody else is after, they'll be able to achieve that much better with Marvel all the way over there in the corner.

"I have a lot of faith in the Archie Comics angle. Marvel comics have been getting worse and worse, more juvenile. As for content, you're not going to see anything good probably ever again out of Marvel. Maybe once a year you'll get the weird thing, like **Marvels**, done by Alex Ross. But aside from that, they don't want particularly good comics, because then they stand out."

And what about Linsner's detractors, the ones who give him flack about Dawn's outfits, but never seem to criticize established comic heroines like Wonder Woman and Vampirella?

"That's another funny thing. From all different women I get the complete spectrum of comments on my work. Half of them will say I draw very realistic women. And you get the other ones who, I don't know, maybe they're lesbians or prudes or something, they give me a hard time about, uh, 'No girls look like that,' or 'Her breasts wouldn't be that firm if they were that big,' to which I usually say, 'Ah, she's only sixteen.'"

The battle begins . . .

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